

## Wildlife Advisory Group

### Minutes of annual meeting and site visit held on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015

**Present:** Ray Jones, Jeremy Ison, Mark Baker

**Apologies:** Sarah Jennings

#### Matters Arising

None

#### Stage 2 works

MB gave a summary of progress to date on Stage 2 works. From a wildlife perspective the most notable works were the sections of offside embankment where waterside trees had been coppiced to reduce the risk of wind-throw. It was generally agreed that provided care was taken with regard to timings and protected species, the creation of more understorey vegetation through the regrowth of coppiced tree and the reduction of shading would on the whole be beneficial for wildlife.

MB informed the group that the next significant compartment of embankment woodland due for coppicing of bankside trees and thinning was the block between the Post Hill depot and the golf course. A management plan for the compartment was being prepared by an arboricultural consultant and an application for a felling licence would be applied for.

#### Battens access ramp

MB informed the group about plans to improve access at Battens Bridge. The works would entail the removal of 20m of hedgerow and a small Ash tree. A larger Ash tree would also need to be felled, but this would be left to coppice back.

Enquiries with DCC's development control team established that the project would be permitted development, but that a method statement provided by the Biodiversity team would need to be followed. This was written following a site visit and the main issues related to timing (September being the best time from a dormouse perspective) and having a dormouse handler on site to undertake a search for dormice ahead of the work. The work is due to be undertaken in September.

#### Coir rolls at Snakes Wood

MB confirmed that this project had been undertaken and appears to have been successful. JI had previously advised that of the species available coir rolls pre-established with Pendulous Sedge would probably be most appropriate, as the species is widespread and common and does well in damp, shady conditions.

#### Management Plan Review

MB flagged up the need for the Canal Management Plan to be reviewed this winter with a draft of the new plan being put to WAG and JAC members for comment in the new year. JI suggested that with regard to canal wildlife, greater reference could be made to the Devon

Priority Species list. Those species on the list which are present at the canal should be identified and any special consideration to their conservation and management be discussed.

It was agreed that all members should re-read the wildlife sections of the current management plan <http://www.devon.gov.uk/gwcmmanagementplan2009-2014.pdf> and provide MB with feedback by the end of November on any changes they feel are necessary.

**Action: All**

#### Wildlife Monitoring / surveys

Birds - RJ reported that the WEBS is ongoing. There are currently no coots on the canal. A notable record was a Lesser Whitethroat.

Dragonflies and butterflies - In general RJ has been doing his casual monitoring earlier in the day and as a result probably isn't seeing as many dragonflies and butterflies. Notable records include two Hairy dragonflies and 2 Scarce Chasers. Damselfly numbers have been low – especially Blue-taileds and Red-eyeds.

Plants – JI reported that he had not been to the canal this year, but that several visits were imminent as he would be undertaking a macrophyte survey during late summer / early autumn.

#### Invasive species

The group noted the continuing spread of Water Soldier and welcomed MB's report that a new weed-clearing boat had been ordered. Although a native species, it was also mentioned that horsetail appeared to be spreading.

#### Any other business

None

#### Site visit

RJ was unable to attend the site visit which followed the meeting, and so this was attended by just MB and JI. They walked a section between Sellake Bridge and Swing Bridge on the towpath and then along Swing embankment on the offside. Key points and actions identified were as follows:

- Fringed lily has spread considerably and it was agreed that MB would arrange for it to be sprayed off with herbicide.

**Action: MB**

- The ornamental lily that had been put into the canal near Greenway Bridge was to be pulled out (whole) or sprayed off.

**Action: MB**

- JI was pleased with the natural recolonization of plants along Sellake embankment and noted several Flowering Rush plants. Prior to the breach, this species was not previously present on the canal, but is native and not likely to be a problem and so does not need to be removed.